

The Geopolitics of Food Insecurity in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* Mukete Juliet Mbone

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Abstract— This paper explores the role of leadership in perpetuating food insecurity in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*. Rooted in the escalating crisis of ecological degradation, colonial legacy, political bureaucracy, and the commodification of food systems, it demonstrates the intricate relationship between power dynamics and food insecurity in African literary discourses, with a focus on *Wizard of the Crow*. Through a critical analysis of the novel, this study examines how Ngũgĩ critiques the role of systemic injustice, political bureaucracy, and failed leadership policies in perpetuating or alleviating food insecurity. By employing geocriticism, ecocriticism, and food system theories, this research reveals the complex interplay between governance, economic policies, and food security, highlighting how authoritarian regimes and neoliberal financial institutions exacerbate food insecurity. This study demonstrates that *Wizard of the Crow* serves as a powerful critique of failed governance, ecological destruction, and social instability, offering a piercing commentary on the intersections between leadership, environmental exploitation, and the struggle for survival. Ultimately, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between power, politics, and food security in African contexts.

Keywords— Geopolitics, Food Insecurity, Power, Ecocriticism, Food System Theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century is marked by unprecedented challenges: climate change, commodity price volatility, persistent poverty, and widening inequality. These forces converge to make food insecurity not only a humanitarian crisis but also a geopolitical one. Prosekov and Ivanova (2018) argue that "food has become a strategic resource, comparable to oil and gas, capable of determining the stability of nations and the direction of international relations" (p. 73). In this sense, food insecurity is inseparable from questions of power, governance, and global justice.

Food has always been more than sustenance; it is a marker of identity, a symbol of power, and a determinant of survival. Mohan (2023) argues that "food is not only nutritional. It is a cultural trait of societies. Eating reflects identity and belonging. Symbolic meaning is embedded in cuisine. Food marks both survival and culture" (p. 2). In the current global context, food has emerged as one of the most crucial concerns of our time, not simply because of its biological necessity but because of the political, economic, and cultural struggles that surround its production, distribution, and consumption. Dagar et al. (2016) also observe that "food security is not only about availability but also about accessibility, affordability, and stability" (p. 5), a reminder that hunger is never merely a natural condition but a socially and politically constructed reality.

Africa provides a particularly compelling terrain for examining the geopolitics of food insecurity. Paradoxically, the continent, rich in natural resources, is plagued by chronic hunger. This paradox is not accidental but the product of historical exploitation, postcolonial governance failures, and global economic structures that perpetuate dependency. Oyeniyi (2019) notes that "food insecurity in Africa is not simply a matter of scarcity but of distribution, access, and the politics of control" (p. 14). The continent's vulnerability to climate shocks, its reliance on subsistence agriculture, and its exposure to global market fluctuations make it a microcosm of the broader challenges facing the Global South. Yet, Africa is not merely a passive victim of these forces. Its writers, intellectuals, and communities have long resisted, critiqued, and reimaged the narratives of hunger and

survival. Literature becomes a crucial site of this resistance as fiction is used to interrogate the realities of hunger, poverty, and inequality, situating these experiences within broader geopolitical contexts.

This paper argues that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* reveals food insecurity as a deliberately manufactured condition produced through authoritarian governance, spatial dispossession, ecological exploitation, and global economic dependency. By situating hunger within broader structures of injustice, the novel functions as both literary critique and political intervention, demonstrating that the struggle against food insecurity is inseparable from the quest for dignity, sovereignty, and justice. Through an analysis of the novel, this study demonstrates the complex relationships between leadership, environmental exploitation, and the struggle for survival in the African context.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the interpretation and analysis of this study, geocriticism, ecocriticism, and food system theory have been adopted. These three theoretical lenses, when brought together, provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of food insecurity as represented in Ngũgĩ's novel.

2.1 Geocriticism and Literary Cartography

Geocriticism, as articulated by Bertrand Westphal (2011), offers a framework for understanding how space is never neutral but layered, plural, and contested. Westphal argues that literary texts do not simply represent pre-existing spaces but actively produce and contest spatial meanings. This approach allows us to demonstrate that farmlands, villages, and cities in the novel are terrains where power clashes with community survival and aggravates food insecurity.

Robert T. Tally Jr.'s (2013) concept of "literary cartography" further illuminates how fiction maps the relationship between space and power. In *Wizard of the Crow*, the fictional state of Aburiria serves as a map of geopolitical struggle, where the distribution of resources, access to land, and control over agricultural production reflect broader patterns of inequality and domination. The "Marching to Heaven" project, for instance, represents a form of spatial dispossession—the appropriation of land for elite vanity projects at the expense of agricultural production and community survival.

Edward Soja's (1996) concept of "Thirdspace" provides another valuable lens. Soja argues for understanding space as simultaneously physical (the material landscape), social (the human interactions and power relations that shape space), and imagined (the symbolic meanings attached to space). In the novel, the Ruler's project to build a tower to heaven represents the imagined space of authoritarian ambition, while the suffering agricultural communities represent the physical space of deprivation, and the resistance movements represent the social space where alternative spatial imaginaries are forged.

2.2 Ecocriticism and Environmental Justice

Ecocriticism, as defined by Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment. The field, as developed by scholars like Lawrence Buell (1995, 2005), treats nature as central to literary analysis and considers ecological crisis as a moral imperative demanding critical attention.

Rob Nixon's (2011) concept of "slow violence" is particularly relevant to this study. Nixon argues that environmental destruction often occurs gradually and invisibly, making it difficult to represent and resist. In *Wizard of the Crow*, the degradation of agricultural land, the pollution of water sources, and the erosion of food sovereignty are forms of slow violence that disproportionately affect the poor and marginalized. Ngũgĩ's novel makes visible this slow violence, revealing how environmental exploitation is not an accidental consequence of development but a calculated extension of power.

Cajetan Iheka (2018) argues that "authoritarian and capitalist elites degrade landscapes for profit, dispossessing communities of their means of sustenance and exposing them to famine and displacement" (p. 92). This observation resonates with Ngũgĩ's portrayal of how the Ruler's regime systematically exploits environmental resources for political gain, leaving ordinary citizens to bear the consequences of ecological collapse.

2.3 Food System Theory and Entitlement

Food system theory examines the complex networks of production, distribution, and consumption that determine access to food. Amartya Sen's (1981) entitlement theory is foundational to this approach. Sen argues that famines result not from absolute food shortages but from failures in access and distribution—people starve not because food does not exist but because they lack the means to obtain it.

Harriet Friedmann (1982) and Philip McMichael (2009) have extended this analysis by examining the global food system, showing how neoliberal policies, structural adjustment programs, and corporate control over agriculture have undermined food sovereignty in the Global South. In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngũgĩ dramatizes this reality, showing how external financial institutions dictate agricultural priorities, deepening dependency and exacerbating hunger.

Food system theory thus illuminates the erosion of food sovereignty as export crops are prioritized over subsistence farming, weakening local autonomy and deepening reliance on imports and external aid. This reflects what McMichael (2009) terms the "corporate food regime," in which global corporations and international financial institutions shape agricultural policies to serve their interests rather than those of local communities.

III. POLITICAL BUREAUCRACY AND THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Political bureaucracy lies at the core of contradiction in Ngũgĩ's *Wizard of the Crow*. Set in the fictional African state of Aburiria, the novel portrays a regime driven by greed, corruption, and absurd political maneuvering that affects food security in the country. Through satirical allegory, Ngũgĩ reveals how authoritarian governance aggravates hunger and environmental degradation while ignoring the suffering masses (Iheka 2018, p. 142). Political decisions are made and politicians implement policies that do not benefit a majority of their people, revealing the absurdity in the regime's detachment from reality.

3.1 The Marching to Heaven Project and Spatial Dispossession

This detachment is evident when the Ruler ignores the suffering of his people but concentrates on the absurd project of building a modern-day Tower of Babel. Even the decision-making process captures the level of difficulty this project will generate and its effect on the people. A proportion of the difficulty level is captured when "the ministers forced themselves out of their different postures and dragged their bodies to get chairs for the visitors and for themselves, inwardly grateful to the Bank officials for interrupting seven days of fatigue, thirst, hunger, and lack of sleep" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 562). Instead of looking into the crisis at hand, the Ruler wasted no time; he asked his Minister of Finance and the Guardian of the National Treasury to summarize their deliberations on the role of Marching to Heaven to the economies of Aburiria, Africa, and the world at large (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 122). This ironic situation, where even the elite are not exempted from the issue of hunger, is the resultant effect of their self-aggrandization and the degree to which man can be self-centred. They spend seven sleepless days kneeling only to be asked to deliberate on the benefit of the project to the people.

This action illustrates how resources are funneled into vanity infrastructure rather than addressing the fundamental needs of the people, including food security. While the people perish from hunger and starvation, the Ruler and his ministers only concentrate on the benefit this structure will bring to the nation, which of course, they know has no concrete benefit. This self-centered nature is even aggravated when the ministers further spend exorbitantly either on their physical appearances, which are all geared towards lip praising, or on chasing and seeking financial support from western aids. Money is spent on plastic surgery which could have been spent on improving the standard of living of the people under their control as ministers. At the end, the situation of the people continues to aggravate as hunger becomes a part and parcel of their existence. We realize that power changes hand but new geopolitical forces are born and new cycles of hunger become evident through political choices like the Marching to Heaven Project and implementations of policies that have no positive role on the nation, connecting physical space and political tyranny.

The Ruler's obsession with the Marching to Heaven project is analogous to the bad political choices implemented by leaders in most underdeveloped nations. It further demonstrates authoritarian spatial control, as Westphal (2011) argues that dictatorships reshape landscapes to reinforce their power. Ngũgĩ's satirical presentation explains why the Ruler, instead of looking for a way out for his people to come out of hunger and starvation, resorts to an absurd project whose major aim was making his country the envy of the world, never minding that his people had no food. This satire exposes leadership as problematic with deeper undercurrents on human existence. Space under such authoritarianism becomes a tool for political vanity rather than functional survival (Westphal 2011). As Iheka (2018) states, "authoritarian and capitalist elites degrade landscapes for profit, dispossessing communities of their means of sustenance and exposing them to famine and displacement" (p. 92).

3.2 The Ruler's Court: Performance and Absurdity

Similarly, we realize that the way power is structured in African contemporary society reveals that a particular class is completely excluded from the scheme of things because they are socially excluded, physically and psychologically alienated. The decision for the construction of the tower did not take into consideration the hungry masses. All the leaders want is for the

Ruler to have a one-on-one discussion with God. These power structures do not only end with the elites but also come down to the common man. Those in power do not care how the common man feels. The only language they understand is how to use power to marginalize and socially isolate those being ruled.

Kamiti recalls his childhood days when even as children, they were already exposed to the effect of bureaucracy:

Just outside the village was a big orchard of plums, pears, mangoes, oranges, tangerines, and lemons, and whenever we passed anywhere near this garden of Eden, the landowner would set his dogs on us children so that we would not steal his fruit. Some of the children did actually find a way of climbing over the fence; they would come back with their pockets bulging with fruit. Still, we did not like his chasing us with dogs on a public path, and we hated even more that he took us all to be thieves deserving of punishment whether we had stolen anything or not (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 117).

Food here becomes an instrument of suppression as the landowner did not spare kids but sent his dogs to chase any kid using that road because of his fear that they might steal his fruits. Those who did not steal are being suppressed by the landlord because he feels he has the power to do that as he believes this is a way to stop prospective thieves from his orchard. He fails to identify that they are just kids, which makes his act very frustrating. Children who are already hungry are chased about and forced to yearn for even more. This explains why the children had to resort to magic to punish their suppressor, thus blocking other potential threats to their safety.

In addition, agriculture, which is a major preoccupation of the people of Aburiria, also dwindled due to bureaucratic tendencies as arable land gets dry and food becomes an illusion for the people. Instead of thinking of ways to better the situation of the suffering masses, the Ruler and his ministers plunge themselves into more absurdist procedures that continue to aggravate hunger in the nation. The ministers too have become puppets in the hands of the Ruler. This is captured in:

In his honor? Why honor him? "Because long before he became a minister, he had already shown his faith in French technology by choosing Paris rather than London for the elongation of his ears." For a while the Ruler was silent, as if contemplating a dawning thought. "Does he go there alone, secretly perhaps?" "I don't know." "Thank you, Titus," he said, almost affectionately. "You can now go back to your work." Soon the Ruler started getting reports that some army officers had received invitations for cocktails and dinners at Western embassies. Coming on the heels of his encounter with the diplomats, he decided that enough was enough; he must find a way to remind these Westerners that in Aburiria he was still the man, regardless of the loans for Marching to Heaven, and there was nothing these arrogant bastards could do about his slaughter of his own people. He issued an ultimatum followed by an order for the armored division to clear the People's Assembly (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 851).

The tendency of authoritarian leaders to prioritize ostentatious projects over urgent socio-economic issues reinforces the systemic neglect that fuels food insecurity. As a leader, the Ruler's priority should have been on the outcome of the visit of the Global Bank as well as its benefits to the people. Instead, the Ruler becomes obsessed about his ministers being honoured when he is still in power. This exposes the effect of absolute power which corrupts the individual.

3.3 Political Factionalism and Sabotage

The Ruler is used to being the center of attraction to the point that when he did not appear on television, "people confidently asserted that, yes, something had to be wrong" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 669). This explains why, in order for him to secure his position as the main focus, he encourages the rift between the ministers as they turn to serve only him and not the nation. The ministers now see each other as enemies, which also led to the creation of 'camps'. The effect of such camps is sabotage, as nothing beneficial for the nation can be implemented with a deep rift like this. To this effect, the ministers now rely on fault finding and disgracing one another. This is vividly captured through the scene below:

Sikiokuu cast a victorious glance at Machokali as if to say, You want a piece of this? I am not finished with you yet. Machokali tried his best not to panic, but his crestfallen look belied his attempts at indifference. "It is with deep regret that I announce that the person in question is none other than Vinjina, Tajirika's wife, Tajirika the chairman of Marching to Heaven, and as everyone knows, is a great pal of our friend here," he said, nodding toward Machokali, expressing more sorrow than anger at this treachery and ingratitude. "The wife of the chairman of Marching to Heaven?" Big Ben Mambo, heretofore a staunch Machokali ally, asked, preparing to jump ship. "Yes, one and the same," Sikiokuu said, and sat down, lowering his head in sorrow yet again, confirming the awful truth. Silence filled the room; Machokali felt it creep under his skin. His first inclination was to fall to the ground and ask for mercy, but he knew that by doing so he would be stepping into the trap that Sikiokuu had laid for him. His second impulse was to jump up and be the first to denounce Tajirika: demand his immediate

arrest and summary execution... Machokali cursed himself for his own negligence. Tajirika had tried to reach him... but Machokali, busy as he was trying to delay the departure of the Global Bank missionaries, had put them on as social calls. Had he returned them, he would now have the facts of the situation instead of being at the mercy of his enemy (Ngũgĩ 2006, pp. 299-300).

The rift instigated by the Ruler encourages Sikiokuu to use Vinjinia's ordeal as a means of stepping on Machokali while the people of the nation continue to starve with jobless youths everywhere. Furthermore, these capitalistic tendencies intensify as the next step adopted by the nation is the manipulation of information to maintain the Ruler's favour. This shows how bureaucracy has become a tool for authoritarian control where even the information disseminated is completely censored. Officials resort to fabricating reports and statistics to justify oppressive policies. Instead of looking for ways to improve the situation at hand, they all engage in activities which are non-beneficial to the common man, indicative of the lack of a drive to solve the problems plaguing the people, which is hunger and unemployment.

3.4 Urban-Rural Spatial Disparities

Another important issue on political bureaucracy is seen through Aburiria's urban-rural spatial disparities, similarly portrayed through Robert T. Tally Jr.'s notion on literary cartography. While bureaucratic elites flourish in cities, rural populations suffer under policies that exploit the land. Political decisions are made on land without verification. In this light, Ngũgĩ exposes how authoritarian regimes manipulate agricultural policies, often prioritizing political loyalty over actual economic viability. Farmers, instead of being supported, are exploited, while the government's economic failures lead to widespread scarcity. The bureaucratic elite, shielded from the suffering of ordinary citizens, engage in self-serving schemes that deepen food insecurity. "The land groaned under the weight of policies that never saw the farmer but demanded from the earth what it no longer had to give" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 297).

The disconnection between governance and ecological reality clearly illustrates how bureaucratic decisions contribute to environmental exhaustion. The land has been overused such that it is no longer productive, thereby aggravating the nature of hunger in the community, exemplifying what Tally (2013) terms cartographic oppression (p. 45). The totalitarian regimes have mapped out social hierarchies onto geographic space, creating visible injustices in land use. Ngũgĩ's narrative reflects this imbalance, where urban spaces serve political elites while agricultural communities face depletion and economic neglect.

3.5 Neoliberal Financial Institutions and Structural Dependency

Moreover, Ngũgĩ's narrative further interrogates the role of neoliberal financial institutions in worsening economic conditions. Neocolonial financial institutions set in as examples of such policies that are hardly ever beneficial to the common man. The Global Bank's involvement in Aburiria, for instance, mirrors historical structural adjustment programs imposed on African nations. One scathing remark within the novel illustrates this dynamic: "For every loan, a pound of our flesh. For every grant, a pint of our blood" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 213).

The contrapuntal ideology behind foreign loans is elaborately captured in this quotation. What makes it rather ironical is the fact that these loans were meant to alleviate Africa from poverty and enable the continent to grow, which of course, is contrary to the reality. The reality is that these loans plunge the country deeper into dependency and a constant state of seeking assistance, which always leaves the country worse off than when the loans were given. The desire to gain this loan from the Global Bank has made the people to become stooges. Just like the Ruler and the politicians who do not want anything to jeopardize the relinquishing of the loan, the masses also believe that their situation can earn them a share of it. The loans are believed to be some sort of saving grace to the nation. This is captured in:

There were always beggars loitering around those kinds of hotels at all hours of day and night. But that night they were there in unusually large numbers, looking for all the world to see like wretchedness itself. The blind seemed blinder than usual, the hunchbacked hunched lower, and those missing legs or hands acted as if deprived of other limbs. The way they carried themselves was as if they thought the Global Bank had come to appreciate and even honor their plight. So they sang, you are the way; we are the world! Help the poor! Help the poor! in different languages because the delegates were assumed to have come from all corners of the globe (Ngũgĩ 2006, pp. 102-114).

This act of demonstration to arouse sympathy has become the order of the day. The poor have resorted to demonstrating their wretchedness as a means to speak for themselves since those in power cannot really relate to their plight. Contrary to their view, this exposes the lawless situation afflicting the nation as well as the idea of poor leadership skills of those in control—a country being reduced to beggars just for the solicitation of funds. This exposes the lawless nature of the nation; the rulers beg

in suits while the ruled beg in rags. This exploitative nature indicates that the people are not only exploited psychologically but also physically and economically. Manly men who should have engaged in agricultural production for the benefit of the nation have all indulged in begging. This external economic intervention further demonstrates how global financial structures help worsen local agricultural crises, rather than resolving them. In essence, it is a literary indictment of governance failures that contribute to famine, environmental degradation, and economic disparity.

3.6 The Performance of Bureaucracy

Also, bureaucratic laws which are supposed to function according to established rules and procedures, ensuring consistency and predictability, are completely a sham in *Wizard of the Crow*. The appointment of ministers in Aburiria is the sole duty of the Ruler, who can appoint and dismiss at will. The alteration of body parts appears to be the criterion for appointments in ministerial positions. Nyawira even mocks Kaniuru when he tries to woo her back while projecting himself as a loyal supporter of the Ruler's party to get his nose done since "Machokali has had his eyes enlarged, Sikiokuu his ears, and Big Ben Mambo his mouth, or rather his tongue. Who better than you to sniff out enemies of His Royal Mightiness?" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 136). The bureaucratic stand in this nation is evidently brought out as based on followers. Those who alter their body parts are seen as the top tier. "But the Ruler misread the signified and gave him the Ministry of Information. This was not bad, and Mambo marked his elevation to a Cabinet post by changing his forenames and called himself Big Ben, inspired by the clock at the British Houses of Parliament" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 15).

This also highlights the performative nature of bureaucracy where officials engage in excessive formalities and rituals that serve no practical purpose and goes to expose how bureaucratic inefficiencies serve as a tool for consolidating power rather than fostering development. The Ruler manipulates these structures to consolidate power, while illustrating how political disorder prevails in postcolonial nations through political sabotage and demonstrates the disconnectedness between leadership and the actual need of the people.

IV. POLITICS AND THE PRECARIETY OF FOOD SYSTEMS

The capitalistic nature of post-colonial Africa is elaborated through failed governance and political mismanagement which fuels ecological destruction and social instability while exposing the connections between leadership, environmental exploitation, and the struggle for survival. During the nationalist struggle in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the African masses, African politicians, and African writers came together against their common enemy, the white man. The impression created at the time was that the colonial ruler was solely responsible for their predicament, plight, and sufferings. During the quest for a nation, nationalism was misconstrued as an ideology. When power finally left the colonial rulers for the Africans, the situation only moved from bad to worse. The masses became excluded from socio-political and economic affairs (in this case food security), marginalized, economically exploited, and socially excluded. While the ruling class uses its own power through politics to oppress and subjugate those with dissenting voices and opinions, the oppressed villagers' reaction is somewhat violent. This power dialectic and dynamic between the two classes constitutes the power conflict in African literature.

4.1 Food as a Tool of Political Control

The consequences of political mismanagement are manifested through severe food insecurity. Inflation makes basic goods unaffordable, and farmers struggle under harsh conditions while elites enjoy excessive feasts. Ngũgĩ illustrates this disparity when government officials dine luxuriously while citizens scavenge for scraps, emphasizing that "The only ones who never know hunger are those who feast on the labor of the poor" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 312). This analogy of Lazarus and the rich man is clearly emphasized. While the elites dine, the masses stay at the gate begging for scraps from the table to be tossed to them.

Authoritarian governance weaponizes food distribution, turning scarcity into a tool of control as "the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture turned food into a commodity subject to the whims of global markets" (Bello 2009, pp. 19-20). In authoritarian contexts, this commodification is compounded by repression as forces of law and order are placed at the gate to chase the beggars away. This demonstrates that even the food which is not needed by elites cannot be tossed away to those who are in need of it. This justifies that the policies put in place exempt the poor, irrespective if they are good or bad, thereby portraying food scarcity as a tool of political control; keeping people desperate enables the regime to ensure their silence. The suffering of the masses therefore becomes a stark representation of failed leadership skills.

4.2 The Dictatorial Nature of the Ruler

African leaders who have metamorphosed into colonial cronies are traced to Ngũgĩ's *Wizard of the Crow*. After independence, the politicians promised a better life for the masses, but independence becomes worrisome as the promises were never met and expectations were crushed. The political landscape is dominated by the Ruler who began ruling the country "before the world began and would end only after the world has ended" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 6). His despotic reign characterized by corruption and favouritism plunges the nation to be driven by self-interest rather than public welfare. His grand ambition, the Marching to Heaven project, is a massive tower meant to symbolize his dominance, however also representing the absurdity of unchecked power.

The Ruler's dictatorial nature is seen through his reaction to defiance. If attempted, the perpetrator or such a person or group of people pays dearly. In the face of opposition, he does not fail to exercise his authority. This can be seen through the imprisonment of his wife Rachel. She is locked up and psychologically traumatized as the scene of her defiance is recreated, so that she remembers for good that what she just did was unacceptable. This is also elaborated when the Wizard of the Crow is treated with disdain and portrayed thus:

The Wizard of the Crow had surrendered to the agents of the regime outside All Saints. She felt as if she had been hit on the head with a club. Had he given up hope, or what? She felt worse when later she got news from Maritha that not even Vinjinia knew where they had taken him. Have they disappeared from him the way they did Machokali? (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 868).

Politics and power now revolve on the Ruler, who controls the country through a system of brutal political patronage revolving around the plundering of public funds. Those who are politically favoured have access to public funds through their wish to consolidate personal wealth and political power, which creates unequal relationships in the process. In the story, the project "Marching to Heaven" explores the extent to which African leaders can go to immortalize themselves. "The Ruler was the sole voice of the people and they love it so" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 24). His self-immortalization introduces a lot of hate from the youths, whose only job now is to look for ways to disrupt his plans.

The movement decided that whenever they wanted to have a meeting, they would form a queue. They would use the queues for purposes of political mobilization. Members decided that, come what may, they would disrupt the Ruler's dedication as they had his birthday (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 150).

With such strategies, that was how the desire for a better nation was born. Instead of constantly showing up in gatherings at different occasions, which were often misrepresented as supporting the Ruler's great plan, they would also make use of the privileges created by the Ruler and his acolytes to expose the nation. The queues which the rulers have taken to showcase the people's desire and excitement for the project become the meeting point of the opposition since gatherings have been banned in society.

4.3 The Movement for the Voice of the People

The Ruler and his cohorts are leaders who epitomize the neocolonial approach to suppression and dehumanisation of individuals. Tajirika, who is the person in charge of the Marching to Heaven project, focuses on looting the entire treasury: "The first loot would go to buying foreign currencies to be stashed in Swiss banks, adding to what is already there" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 646). With their interactions with these foreign investors and investments, the officials get engaged in lavishing parties, forgetting about the plight of the masses and the youth. Some of them now dressed like beggars shout out songs to end the loans from the West.

Almost as if in answer to the prayers of the media, a group of beggars started shouting slogans beyond the decorum of begging. Marching to Heaven is Marching to Hell. Your Strings of Loans Are Chains of Slavery. Your Loans Are the Cause of Begging. We Beggars Beg the End of Begging (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 93).

The immediate cause of this resistance from the masses is because of the excesses indulged by the government since the Matching to Heaven project was launched. Instead of them struggling to improve the situation in society, the ruler and his officials have instead indulged in more merriment and feasting, which incurs more loans for the country. The 'beggars' now understand that it is only through their rioting that the rulers can regain understanding of the state of events in the nation.

Furthermore, Tajirika made a new banking opening suggestion for the Ruler, who agreed to it; thus, "the idea of the Mwathirika Banks was so appealing that the Ruler insisted that Vinginia, Tajirika's wife, become the nominal founder and managing director, while the Ruler's sons, its board of directors" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 647). The action of the Ruler to appoint his son as the

Managing Director is a pointer of his autocratic leadership; the masses have been subjugated; they don't checkmate credibility anymore as the state now becomes a family business as he affirms "a crook after my own heart, the Ruler muttered to himself, mesmerized by the simple beauty of Tajirika's plan and he was glad that he had appointed him governor" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 648). Political corruption has caused problems in Aburiria. The Ruler also appointed Titus Tajirika as chairman of the Marching to Heaven birthday gift legacy project, comprised of members of the Ruler's cabinet. The masses were not happy about it, while Kamiti and Nyawira organized the Movement for the Voice of the People and the group stood firm to ensure that this project became unrealized.

4.4 The False Promise of Multiparty Democracy

Ngũgĩ exposes how Titus Tajirika feels very happy to be the chairman and how livelihoods will change for him. This is a sign of political corruption and an unequal relationship, failing to consider the masses, who should be cared for. Tajirika's wife, Vinjina, is furious about his sudden wealth. "He had told her that this was just the beginning of better days to come. The morrow would bring even more money, for many people were coming to see him. When the Global Bank releases its loans and construction begins, my money will go through the roof" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 173). Tajirika is very concerned about his self-desire against the Aburiria people. He fails to realize that the people are not happy with the state of events in the country. With youths who are jobless and educated youths who have now been reduced to the level of beggars, there is bound to be resistance from the masses.

Looting and stealing public funds in the name of politics have become a lifestyle of those in authority, while the masses are suffering. Tajirika does not care about the impact of the project anymore; it is on contract bidders, those for consultation just to keep stealing. A government for the people is now family affairs. However, ministers like Machokali and Sikiokuu have lost their positions in the government with the rise of Tajirika to prominence. Since they are imperialist representatives in the government, they all have a negative impact on the Aburiria people.

The inability to govern in Africa is a concern; after the autocratic Ruler died, "he ceded all his powers to the new Ruler of Aburiria, Emperor Titus Vespasianus Whitehead" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 753), who functions equally like his predecessor. It shows that African Rulers are more interested in socio-political corruption and class dialectics that destabilize our society from growing. The Ruler's dictatorial government does not serve the will of the people. There are countless issues of political corruption and unequal relationships among the Ruler's cabinet.

International communities are not benefiting from dictatorship either, as the unveiling of the multiparty system gives birth to baby democracy. "At the foot was the inscription in large Aburirian national colours: BABY D. Behold the Baby Democracy, he called" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 698). The autocratic nature of the Ruler now gives birth to multi-party-political parties in Aburiria, creating more segregation and political corruption. The fact is that the new political dispensation in Aburiria and Africa has not resulted in any genuine changes or benefits for the masses. It is just part of the global system of fake freedom, which recycles the same old faces. Across Africa, this is exactly what is experienced.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o counters the multi-party system as a weak and recycling system that will further destroy the Aburirian. This comes to pass when Titus Tajirika, who finds favour with the Ruler, eventually stages a coup and becomes the new Ruler. In the same vein, Nyawira and Kamiti, who both act as the Wizards of the Crow, seem to lay their hope and faith in the intellectuals, the youths, and the artists, as people who can make positive changes in Aburiria. And Africa needs this activism to regain success devoid of socio-political corruption.

4.5 The Promise of Alternative Knowledge Systems

Ngũgĩ's deployment of Kamiti, Nyawira, and other members of the Movement for the Voice of the People can deconstruct post-colonial reality and provide much-needed leadership. In the character of Kamiti, the novel also proposes the embrace of a broader consciousness in seeking solutions to the problems of Africa. He declares: "I want to learn more about the prophets and the teachers from the East, like Buddha, Jain's Mahavira, Guru Nanak of the Sikhs, and Confucius of China" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 210).

One of the key findings in this discussion is how literary texts unmask the failures of political leadership, demonstrating that governance is often entangled with self-serving bureaucracy that exacerbates systemic crises. In *Wizard of the Crow*, leadership becomes a grotesque spectacle, reinforcing the disconnect between power and the needs of the people. We also discovered that food insecurity, as a direct consequence of policy failures and environmental mismanagement, emerges as a central theme in this work. The systematic displacement of communities and the erosion of food sovereignty reflect broader geopolitical

struggles, positioning African nations within exploitative global trade networks that prioritize profit over sustainability. Through Ngũgĩ's literary imagination, *Wizard of the Crow* illuminates how food insecurity is not merely a byproduct of natural scarcity but a politically manufactured condition.

4.6 Colonial Legacies and Environmental Exploitation

Colonial legacies, though often discussed in historical and economic terms, remain deeply embedded in the socio-political realities shaping contemporary governance. The enduring effects of colonial policies, particularly in agricultural and resource management systems, are manifested in *Wizard of the Crow*, where postcolonial identity is marked by displacement, economic precarity, and the lingering grip of Western intervention. The novel interrogates how postcolonial states struggle to assert autonomy while still operating within frameworks of dependency that sustain global power hierarchies.

Despite these challenges, African literary responses do not merely dwell on oppression; they offer narratives of resistance, cultural reclamation, and political agency. Indigenous knowledge systems and oral traditions serve as counter-discourses that challenge hegemonic structures and propose alternative models of sustainability that preserve histories erased by neocolonial violence. The novel promotes a collective, revolutionary vision of ecology and "assumes an alignment between the fight for environmental preservation and anti-colonial struggle" (Okuyade 2011, p. 17).

As Okuyade (2011) puts it, "the wilderness becomes a place of retreat where reconnection with goodness and life's essence is made" (p. 22). This retreat into nature illustrates belonging, or "communion with each other and nature" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 205), allowing characters to become closer to themselves, to each other, and to the natural world during their escape into the forest outside Eldares:

Love was everywhere: in the tree branches where the nests of weaverbirds hung...Love was there among the creeping plants that twined around the tree trunks; yes, in the blackberries, some of which they plucked and fed to each other...Love was everywhere in this forest, but neither Nyawira nor Kamiti mentioned a word (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 206).

V. RESISTANCE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY

Despite these challenges, resistance emerges. The Wizard of the Crow, a symbolic and mystical figure, represents the fight against tyranny. Characters like Kamiti and Nyawira become catalysts for change, using subversive tactics to expose government corruption. Their struggle showcases Ngũgĩ's belief that dictatorship ultimately breeds its own downfall, as captured in the line: "Fear is the dictator's finest weapon, but hope is his fiercest enemy" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 401). Ngũgĩ suggests that, even under oppression, citizens have the power to reclaim their rights.

In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngũgĩ decries the mismanagement of the state's resources through multinational corporations (MNCs) to expose the root cause of hunger as a result of failed leadership. He portrays how the masses are politically victimized and socially excluded from the nation's wealth and power as land and resources are depleted, leaving negative consequences on the people. The air is polluted just like the land and food becomes very scarce as little or nothing is projected for local farming when the MNCs are leased such lands. The acquisition of these farmlands by foreigners only seeks to meet the growing markets in their countries of origin, and not for the Aburirian community.

Ngũgĩ projects Kamiti's use of China and India to draw a stand for Africa to copy how they too can be freed from imperialism. Kamiti and Nyawira, as Wizards of the Crow, use the African belief system through herbs and cure people instead of globalization which keeps African nations indebted. Politics and dialectics run through Africans as a people; however, the imperialists made it an upgraded form of political corruption and unequal relationships in a different dimension.

Stressing various instances in the novel, Africans have understood that socio-political corruption and class dialectics are barriers to African development. Nyawira posits: "I believe that blacks have been oppressed by whites; females by males; peasants by landlords; workers by the lords of capital" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 428). This shows that the issue of political corruption and unequal relationships was happening before, but at this stage, it is much more advanced than before. Kamiti and Nyawira made remarkable impacts for Africa to be in the best state of equality, fairness, oneness, and a classless society. Through these satires and social critiques, *Wizard of the Crow* exposes how political failures lead to food insecurity, leaving Aburiria's citizens trapped in cycles of poverty and hunger. Ngũgĩ uses storytelling to urge reflection on governance and economic policies, warning against the dangers of unchecked power, reinforcing the idea that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The perception of a nation's food security by both the rulers and the ruled has placed many African countries in a dilemma and this poses a challenge to nation-building. The fundamental problem of governance in African contemporary societies is the

concept of "you eat, or you are eaten"—that is, if one does not eat, he or she will be eaten up. This gastronomic mode of existence has resulted in a lack of patriotism and faith that puts the nation in a dilemma. This egocentric and egoistic way of life of both the rulers and the ruled has narrowed down their perception and conception of a nation. While the ruling elite sees the nation as its plantation where it can feed fat, it is also reminded of the various promises this ruling class made during the campaign for self-government and independence. This dialectic in perception and conception of socio-political and economic power has always created conflicts and contradictions in African contemporary politics.

Due to the colonial powers' exploitation of natural resources, various colonial development strategies have failed to prioritize the environment. It caused disastrous environmental problems in a vastly colonized world (Maryon-Davis 2019). Resources that should be allocated to agriculture and food production are instead funneled into this vanity project, worsening economic conditions for ordinary citizens, with corrupt ministers running rampant, competing to outdo one another in servitude to the Ruler, rather than addressing the country's food shortages.

VI. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* reveals that food insecurity is deliberately produced through authoritarian governance, ecological disruption, and global economic dependency. Hunger is consistently depicted as a political instrument rather than an accidental consequence of crisis. Several key findings emerge from this analysis.

6.1 Spatial Dispossession

Spatial dispossession emerges as a major finding. The "Marching to Heaven" project illustrates how fertile land is appropriated for elite vanity, displacing communities and undermining agricultural productivity. This manipulation of geography demonstrates how authoritarian ambition reshapes landscapes to enforce inequality. As Westphal (2011) argues, dictatorships reshape landscapes to reinforce their power. Ngũgĩ's narrative reflects this imbalance, where urban spaces serve political elites while agricultural communities face depletion and economic neglect.

The novel demonstrates that space is never neutral but is actively produced and contested. The Ruler's project to build a tower to heaven represents the imagined space of authoritarian ambition, while the suffering agricultural communities represent the physical space of deprivation, and the resistance movements represent the social space where alternative spatial imaginaries are forged.

6.2 Ecological Violence

Ecological violence is another significant result. The novel highlights deforestation, soil exhaustion, and pollution as consequences of exploitative development. These environmental disruptions intensify deprivation among the poor while shielding elites, situating hunger within broader ecological collapse. The erosion of food sovereignty is evident in the prioritization of export crops over subsistence farming.

This finding resonates with Nixon's (2011) concept of "slow violence," which argues that environmental destruction often occurs gradually and invisibly. In *Wizard of the Crow*, the degradation of agricultural land and the pollution of water sources are forms of slow violence that disproportionately affect the poor and marginalized. Ngũgĩ's novel makes visible this slow violence, revealing how environmental exploitation is not an accidental consequence of development but a calculated extension of power.

6.3 Global Economic Dependency

Structural adjustment programs and neoliberal globalization weaken local autonomy while deepening reliance on imports and external aid. Communities lose control over their sustenance while international actors dictate agricultural priorities, which are sustained through asymmetrical power relations. This reflects McMichael's (2009) concept of the "corporate food regime," in which global corporations and international financial institutions shape agricultural policies to serve their interests rather than those of local communities.

The novel dramatizes Amartya Sen's (1981) entitlement theory, which argues that famines often result from failures in access and distribution rather than absolute shortages. The characters in *Wizard of the Crow* starve not because food does not exist but because they lack the means to obtain it, caught in a system where political elites control access to resources.

6.4 Food as a Tool of Political Control

Elites exploit scarcity as leverage, while global institutions reinforce dependency through trade regimes and aid flows. Citizens experience hunger as both deprivation and domination, caught in unequal relations at local and global levels. The novel demonstrates that food has become a strategic resource capable of determining the stability of nations and the direction of international relations (Prosekov and Ivanova 2018).

The suffering of the masses becomes a stark representation of failed leadership skills. Authoritarian governance weaponizes food distribution, turning scarcity into a tool of control. This justifies that the policies put in place exempt the poor, irrespective if they are good or bad, thereby portraying food scarcity as a tool of political control.

6.5 Hunger as a Site of Struggle

Despite deprivation, hunger is portrayed as a site of struggle where communities contest domination through satire, collective action, and the reclamation of food as identity and dignity. This positioning of hunger as both a weapon of control and a terrain of resistance demonstrates the novel's function as both critique and intervention.

The Movement for the Voice of the People represents a form of resistance that challenges the dominant narratives of development and political legitimacy. Characters like Kamiti and Nyawira become catalysts for change, using subversive tactics to expose government corruption. The novel suggests that, even under oppression, citizens have the power to reclaim their rights.

VII. CONCLUSION

The relationship between authoritarian governance, ecological collapse, global economic dependency, and asymmetrical power relations are inseparable from the deeply entrenched structures that perpetuate food insecurity in *Wizard of the Crow*. This study demonstrates that hunger is a weapon of domination, sustained by spatial dispossession, environmental violence, and asymmetrical power relations.

Through geocriticism, ecocriticism, and food system theory, the analysis situates hunger within broader structures of injustice while highlighting resistance politics as a site of struggle and identity. Ngũgĩ's narrative functions as both literary critique and political intervention, exposing the entanglement of hunger with space, ecology, and global capitalism. The novel demonstrates that the struggle against food insecurity is part of the broader quest for dignity, sovereignty, and justice in Africa and beyond.

In dramatizing hunger as both engineered and contested, *Wizard of the Crow* contributes to a deeper understanding of food insecurity as a multidimensional crisis and a terrain of transformation. It also serves as a critical intervention that challenges dominant narratives of development, resource control, and political legitimacy.

To sum it up, Africans have an unwanted, poor livelihood in various nations due to corrupt leadership and the looting of national treasuries. The poor masses have been subjugated into unequal relationships, which has deprived them of enjoying equal privileges with those in power. As such, genuine decolonization is a falsehood, as imperialism now functions as neocolonialism. To this effect, leadership should prioritize the well-being of the people rather than personal grandeur. In essence, *Wizard of the Crow* is not just a tale; it is also a wakeup call to societies facing similar struggles to sit up and work towards policies that can better improve the political, social, and economic standards of their nation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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